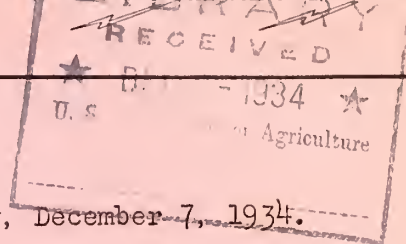


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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, December 7, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Stirring Days." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and the Extension Service, U.S.D.A.

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Most cake tastes best when it's fresh, when it's no more than -- say, a day out of the oven. But our traditional holiday cake is an exception to this general rule. Christmas fruit cake improves with age. The rich spicy fruit mixture "grows mellow" on standing, as old-time cooks would explain. The fact is that the various ingredients blend in flavor as they stand together making that special taste for which this cake is so famous.

This holds true also for pudding. Most pudding is best when fresh. But real Christmas plum pudding grows better if it has time to "ripen."

No wonder, then, that good English housewives consider the last of November and the early days of December the stirring days of the year -- the zero hour for mixing and cooking Yuletide cake and pudding.

As a matter of fact, the British call the last Sunday in November "Stir Up Sunday." The name came from the collect read on that day in the Church of England which begins: "Stir up, we beseech Thee, the wills of Thy faithful people." But the story goes that the women in the congregation usually take that challenge to heart as a reference to the stirring that should be going on in their kitchens in preparation for Christmas.

But there. I didn't plan to talk about the British today. I planned to tell you about stirring days on this side of the Atlantic. American housewives are also at the job of making fruit cake and plum pudding at this season, and they're making them not only for their own use but also for Christmas gifts or for sale. Homemade fruit cake and plum pudding is a source of considerable income to many homemakers these days. For example, in Alabama members of the home demonstration club have made a real business of selling Alabama fruit cake that features home-grown ingredients.

Miss Dana Gatchell, in charge of cookery at the State College, had the happy idea of working out a good recipe for Alabama Christmas fruit cake. Then Miss Helen Kennedy, the State extension specialist, carried the recipe out to the housewives of the state and many of them have found it delicious and inexpensive for home festivities and also a good money-maker. Quite a number of women living on Alabama farms now take orders for these fruit cakes around Christmas time and sell them at their markets.

Last year in one county one woman sold twenty-five of these Christmas cakes; another sold thirty-four; and another a hundred and fifty pound packages, attractively wrapped. All these three women have orders for many more cakes this year. These are just three examples of women who have been making a success of selling this special Christmas fruit cake. By the way, they have found that by using a pressure cooker to do most of the cooking of these cakes, they can save time and fuel in making them.

Well, I think you'll be interested in the recipe for Alabama fruit cake with the ingredients adapted to that locality. You probably won't want to write this recipe down, but I think you'll want to hear just what goes into this successful mixture. Here's a list of the ingredients:

1 pound of butter,	1 teaspoon of nutmeg,
3/4 pound of sugar,	1 teaspoon of cloves,
9 eggs,	1/4 teaspoon of salt,
1 pound of flour,	1-1/2 pounds watermelon preserve,
2 tablespoons of baking powder,	1-1/2 pounds or preserved figs,
2 tablespoons of mace,	2 pounds of raisins,
2 teaspoons of cinnamon,	1 pound of pecan meats, and
	1/2 cup of grape juice.

You see, the butter, eggs, watermelon preserves, preserved figs, grape juice and pecans are all Alabama farm products. The watermelon preserves give the effect of the citron so often used in fruit cake, and are less expensive.

Now here's the way you mix the Alabama cake. First, drain and cut the fruit into medium-sized pieces. Also cut up the pecans. Then, cream the butter, add the sugar and then the well-beaten eggs. Mix and sift the dry ingredients twice. Then, add half the dry mixture to the sugar, butter, and eggs. Add the rest of the dry mixture to the fruits. Then, combine the two mixtures, and add the grape juice.

Now about the cooking. The Alabama women do a lot of canning in summer so they have steam pressure cookers and tin cans, and they put them to use in making Christmas cake. They have found that for gifts, or for sale, a No. 2 tin can makes a good container for cooking these cakes. A No. 2 can will hold about one pound of the cake. Grease the can and cut wax paper to fit the bottom. Then fill the can about three-fourths full of the mixture. You can tie two thicknesses of waxed paper over the top to keep out the moisture, or you can cover with the lids that come with the cans.

Now if you cook with a pressure cooker, first set the cans in the cooker and steam them, without clamping down the top -- steam them while the cake rises. Then fasten the cover, close the petcock, and cook one hour at twelve pounds' pressure. Now take out the cans and dry the cake in a slow oven for half an hour.

If you have no pressure cooker, you can bake the cake in a slow oven, or you can steam it three hours and finish off with half an hour in the oven. If you steam this mixture, it will be light and moist, will make a good Christmas pudding. But steaming and then baking means extra work. Usually, you'll make just as good a cake by baking in a slow oven during the entire period.

This recipe for Alabama fruit cake makes about ten pounds of cake when baked, or fills 10 No. 2 cans.

